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Ogden. On national character. 1843

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L E C T U R E
ON
NATIONAL CHARACTER,

DELIVERED AT THE
JAMAICA LYCEUM, L I.,

APRIL 25TH, 1843,

BY
JAMES DE PEYSTER OGDEN.

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Published by request, and for the use of the Lyceum.  
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ON

NATIONAL CHARACTER.

THE value of a good name is equally important to nations and to individuals. The essential advantage, indeed absolute necessity, of character, is exemplified in every day's experience: it may be traced in every incident that affects our prosperity or adversity; and is felt in its effect on every event destined to exert an influence, for weal or woe, on the future prospects and condition of a people. The character of a nation may be said in some respects to be made up of that of the individuals who compose it; for individual traits and qualities, acquirements and capabilities, must, of necessity, form component parts of national character. The acquisition of personal reputation, and the maintenance of the fair fame of a people, may be secured by an adherence to the same rules of right, and to the same principles of rectitude; and may accordingly be said to rest on the same foundation. Still, national character is influenced by a combination of causes, is represented by a vast mass of different individuals of our common species, and is controlled and modified by the varying impulses and impressions that arise from our social condition. We find qualities possessed by particular communities in which others seem to be entirely deficient: there are virtues, too, for which some are famed, and vices also to which others again seem more peculiarly prone, according as the varying circumstances

and conditions of life produce their effect upon the moral and social character of man. Sometimes causes, apparently trivial in themselves, produce important results by their tendency to harmonize the feelings, enlist the sympathies, and elevate the sentiments of the great body of a people. Natural scenery, of a particular character, has its effects in attaching men to their homes; and as it increases their fondness for their native soil, serves, in this way, to quicken and enlarge their patriotism. National music, when embodied in captivating songs, skilfully addressed to the better feelings and nobler passions of our nature, and adapted to the particular crisis of national affairs, is well calculated, by infusing a spirit of enthusiasm, to kindle national ardor, and excite a love of country.

The character of the people of remote ages, as well as that of the present nations of Christendom, with much that is common to all, differs, each from the other, in many essential particulars. There is found a difference in religion and education—in climate and language—in customs and pursuits—in habits and occupations. There is also a difference in the forms of government, in the effects of a good or bad administration of government under any form, but, above all, in the fundamental laws and institutions of a country. All these, in their respective degrees and varied combination, exert a pervading influence, and exercise a controlling effect upon the moral and physical character of man in his individual and collective capacity; and thus constitute what is termed National Character.

A minute analysis, or a full investigation, of the numerous branches of so comprehensive a subject, would lead me far beyond the limits prescribed by the occasion. I shall confine myself, therefore, in conformity with the general outline

just presented, merely to a sketch of the prominent causes, and an allusion to the leading events, that have exerted a predominating influence in the formation and improvement of the character of nations, and of the effects they have produced: together with a brief review of our own government and the character of our people, and of the value of the laws and institutions of our country.

After the confusion of tongues, at the building of the tower of Babel, the people became dispersed to every region comprised within the limits of the ancient world, and then were founded, among the first, the kingdoms of Assyria and Egypt. Their principal successors, in after-time, the knowledge of whose history has reached us, were Greece and Rome. China also lays claim to primeval origin, and history encourages a belief in the correctness of her pretensions. Assyria, and Egypt, and Rome, still exhibit, in their ruins, proud testimonials of their former grandeur, and enduring monuments of the power of their people. Still, the waters of oblivion may be said to have swept over them.

China alone, of the original kingdoms of remote antiquity, may be said to remain, preserving the integrity of her original possessions, boasting through an almost unbroken line of succession, of her imperial but stable government, and maintaining the greatest population ever claimed or possessed by any power of ancient or modern times.

Religion may well be considered as the foundation of all instruction, as it forms the rudiments of education, in all civilized nations, and thus enters early in life into the formation of National Character; and although, over a large portion of the Eastern world, the people still bow to the gods of heathen idolatry, even this religious worship has its hold

on the minds, and is not without its effect in solemnizing the feelings, of the people. But throughout Christendom, whether the Greek or Romish, the Reformed or Protestant faith prevail, the worship of a superior Being, that is inculcated, and the homage to a common Creator, that is offered up, give their impression to the mind in its earliest stages of being and intelligence: and although the influence thus imparted may become weakened in after-life, it returns and is ever strongly felt at the close of existence; for, when everything else is fading away, religion comes to the aid of suffering humanity with its blessings and its hopes.

In the early periods of history, the patriarchal form of government was best adapted to the primeval simplicity of the husbandman and the shepherd. But as people multiplied, their accustomed means of subsistence were obtained with more difficulty, and as new demands arose, and new wants were to be supplied, the pursuits and occupations of men became changed and diversified. Laws then became necessary to define rights and secure possessions; and rulers, clothed with authority, were required to enforce the laws and preserve the order of society. By degrees, kings and armies, thrones and sceptres, either followed of course, or were deemed essential to uphold national dignity, support magisterial authority, and maintain national security. As confidence increased, cities, and kingdoms, and empires were founded and established, while arts, and arms, and science, and literature, and commerce, and laws, and liberty flourished, at intervals, in the world, under the various forms of government that succeeded to each other, and according to the security that was afforded to person and property by the laws of the country and the stability of national authority.

A representative form of government, an approximation to which was exhibited in the commonwealth of Rome, and the confederation of the Grecian States, had its trials for a time, and flourished for a season. The Hanseatic league, consisting of a few free cities, strengthened and enriched by commerce, and improved by its enlightening aid and liberalizing spirit, possessed a fair portion of rational freedom, and long enjoyed a deserved reputation, with a high commercial character. Carthage, too, deriving her character and strength from being the mart of trade, and mistress of the then commercial world, and for more than a century the rival of Rome itself, boasted of a form of government alike exempt from the effects of popular commotion, and free from despotic sway. Rome, the mistress of the world, and the last power of importance that flourished before the Christian era, with whose history we are well acquainted—Rome was essentially military in her character. Yet she was on the pinnacle of her fame—her national character stood highest when her government was the most free—when the rights and privileges of her people were most secure, and their liberties best protected. And although, when the contending and degenerate factions of the State were overthrown, and bound by the golden chains of the Augustan reign, which, having closed the Temple of Janus as a symbol of profound peace, substituted for the rude sway of military chieftains, the mildest form of despotic rule, Rome prospered under the Imperial purple; still she lived upon the national character she had previously acquired, long after the foundations of her real power and greatness were crumbling beneath her feet. The people of Rome had become tired of their freedom, had abused the privileges they enjoyed, and their liberties departed for ever: and although Rome survived for four hundred years after the advent of Christianity, she fell at last under the

scourge of the Goths and Vandals, and her fall was succeeded by a long reign of barbarism.

The Gothic ages lasted for a thousand years, during which, nations were without character, and a dreary night of ignorance and barbarism prevailed in the world. Two men, however, whose enlightened views were far in advance of their times, and whose achievements bear the stamp of gigantic power and commanding genius, appeared in Europe to illumine this age of barbarism. The light of their talents and services reflected increased lustre on their character, emanating, as it did, from surrounding darkness, and their names long stood prominent as beacon-lights for their own and for succeeding ages.

Charlemagne, or Charles the Great, King of France, above one thousand years ago, began the German, afterwards called the Western Empire ; and which, with France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and Hungary, under his sway, began to rival ancient Rome itself. He founded seminaries of learning, was the patron of scientific men, and established an academy at Aix-la-Chapelle. He left with the people whom he conquered, their customs and usages, with such laws as they possessed, endeavoring only to improve them. He attempted, though unsuccessfully, to introduce uniformity of weights and measures. He conceived the vast plan of uniting the Rhine and the Danube, and the Atlantic, with the Euxine Sea, by means of a canal, and he employed his army on the work ; but the ignorance of his age in hydraulics prevented the accomplishment of this great undertaking. In a word (as was justly said of him,) he prevented the total decline of the sciences in the West, by supplying new aliment to their expiring light. One hundred years after him, Alfred the Great, of England, after subduing the Danish in-

vaders, composed a body of laws, divided England into counties, tithings, and hundreds; erected county courts, and founded the University of Oxford. Alfred gave also to England the trial by jury, and suggested the necessity of a naval force for her protection, and thus became the architect, in its early formation, of her distinctive national character. Four hundred years afterwards, or six hundred years ago, the barons of England wrested from their monarch, King John, the famous Magna Charta of the land—the charter of their liberties. The laws and improvements therefore of Alfred, together with the rights and liberties secured by Magna Charta, laid the foundation for the permanent stability, and furnished the essential elements that enter into the composition of the national character of England. The art of printing, of which China is supposed to have made the first discovery and use, was not invented in Europe until 1440, nor introduced into England, with metal types, until 1471. This important discovery mainly contributed to the revival of learning and diffusion of science in the sixteenth century, and nearly all the illustrious men from whom our present stock of knowledge is derived, have sprung up and flourished within the last three hundred years; a short period indeed, when compared with the duration of the Christian world.

This general diffusion of knowledge, and the consequent light shed on the science of government, have ameliorated the condition of man, elevated him in the scale of being, and improved the character of nations. It is only, however, under the guardianship and protection of equal laws and free institutions, gradually introduced, and wisely adapted to the wants of a people, that individual character can become essentially improved. Rulers must be taught that they were vested with authority for the benefit of the people, and made to feel that

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responsibility, and that the laws are their superiors ; and as the rudiments of education and the first principles of rational liberty proceed, hand in hand, in progressive advancement, the people will take increased interest and feel an honest pride in the public welfare ; and thus the fairest prospect will be afforded, that individual happiness and prosperity will advance with the improvement and elevation of national character.

The two events—among the most important in history—that have exercised the greatest influence in changing and improving the social and political condition of man, were our own Revolution, and that of France, which followed it. Their consequences are now beginning to be felt and appreciated, for they will remain as guides and landmarks for other people and for future times. The laws and institutions founded by Alfred, and the principles of liberty established by Magna Charta, accustomed the English people, for ages past, to feel and understand their rights ; and thus enabled England to improve, to the fullest extent, by the lights and information of later days. Our ancestors, accordingly, who sought an asylum in the western world, were well grounded in the principles of a government of laws, intimately acquainted with their practical operation, while they understood and appreciated the rights and immunities they conferred and guaranteed. These they claimed to exercise and enjoy, in the new world, under the protection of the mother country. They did not, therefore, in fact, desire a revolution in order to become free ; for, in all essential particulars, and, of right, they were so already : they were only determined to maintain what they deemed their unalienable rights. They accordingly resisted encroachment at the outset, and for a series of years before they declared themselves independent, they were constantly employed in opposing, to the arbitrary conduct of the

mother country, the arguments of men resolved to remain free in defence of the principles of civil liberty, and of those rights of which they were in actual possession : and when reason and remonstrance were urged in vain, they had to decide the question whether they should resist, regardless of consequences, in order to continue in the enjoyment of their birthrights, or yield them in subjection to the unjust and unlawful pretensions of the British crown.

Our Revolution, therefore, was one of principle, and when our independence was secured, a Constitution, recognizing and confirming all the principles set forth in the Declaration of Independence, was adopted by all the States of a confederacy forming our federal Union, and furnishing a model of the freest government that had ever been presented to the world ; and thus was laid the foundation of a national character, for the formation of which no other people have ever possessed the same materials or advantages, or seem destined to have an opportunity to prove themselves worthy either to acquire or enjoy. Yet the light of our example and the principles of our government have benefitted the world, and will serve, still more, to improve the condition, secure the rights, and promote the happiness of other nations ; not to the extent, or in the form of our own free and peculiar Republican institutions ; still quite as far, for the present, as may be consistent with their means of appreciating, or their capacity for enjoying, the blessings of civil liberty : for it must be remembered that all changes are not improvements, and that a people must become prepared by degrees for every important alteration and amelioration in their political and social system. France assisted us in our Revolutionary struggles, and the effect of our example and success began to manifest itself on the part of those who had witnessed and nobly shared our toils and victories.

It may be considered an established truth, that all revolutions in States, indeed all revolts against lawful authority, have arisen from the weak or corrupt administration of those in power. France was ruled by nearly an absolute monarch; and oppression and priest-craft, corruption and licentiousness, enslaved the people and degraded the character of the nation; and when, at last, they rebelled, the people, who had been goaded into resistance by persevering acts of tyranny and cruelty, were blamed for all the atrocities that were committed in the name of Liberty. But, it may well be asked, whom should posterity hold justly responsible for these atrocities? The monarch and his ministers who tolerated the licentiousness of the court—permitted the corruptions in the State, and issued their secret orders for men to be buried alive in the dungeons of the Bastille?—or the people, who, suffering these enormities at the hands of their rulers, resisted in the name of their country, under the pressure of their accumulated wrongs? Were the people of France, then, alone to blame?

In the convention of Pilnitz in 1791, a treaty was formed by the Emperor of Austria and King of Prussia, the professed object of which was to invade France and remodel her government; and in their proclamation, and that of the Duke of Brunswick, it was intimated, nay openly declared, that the King of France had not been sincere in accepting the constitution. Where, at this crisis, were the friends of their country? Had the misguided nobility of France really felt for the people, and been true to their King,—had they cared more for their country and less for themselves, they might have saved the life of their monarch and rescued from anarchy the cause of social order. The idea of foreign interference, joined to a suspicion of domestic treason, was sufficient to alarm every friend to his country; while the

foes of freedom were thus afforded an opportunity to arouse the evil passions of those who sought to rise to consequence and power amid the storms of civil discord. The sceptre of royalty once wrested from weak and inefficient hands—the bonds of society, so loosely and corruptly held together, once broken asunder—full sway was given to the worst and basest passions of mankind to triumph over the ruin of virtue and social order. The people of France were indeed unprepared for liberty, and, as a natural consequence, the only escape from the horrors of anarchy was found to be in the arms of despotism. Napoleon profited by the spirit of the Revolution, and the commander of the army soon became the ruler of the people: and that army, now accustomed to conquest, became as eager to signalise itself under the protecting wings of the Imperial eagles, as it had before been anxious for combat under the banners of Liberty and Equality. Napoleon was as great a foe as Freedom ever knew. Regardless of all interests and rights that interfered with his ambition, he had not only France, but nearly the whole continent subjected to his dominion, and while his power subdued their will, the character of the people became debased by his tyranny. Yet he seemed to be an instrument in the hands of Providence to humble the pride of kings, who were made to bow, in submission, to this child and champion of a revolution. The people of Europe at last rose in their might: his armies were defeated, and the power of Napoleon was extinguished, and when the allies restored the Bourbons to the throne, Louis was compelled to give a charter to the people of France. A charter, however, is not a contract between the sovereign and the nation, nor is it a constitution framed by the people: it is the free gift of the crown. But, after the experience of the past, and in the present enlightened age, a charter once granted can never be recalled. The people of France of the present day wish not to war

with the name of Royalty ; but they desire, and think themselves entitled to demand, that their essential rights should be defined and recorded beyond the power of a monarch's will to alter, or his mandate to annul.

Observing men in France had long thought that the essential and vivifying spirit of the Revolution still existed, having been suppressed, *not* extinguished, during the reign of Napoleon ; and that, before long, a revolution in public opinion would obtain for France the admission of doctrines, and the acknowledgement of views of rational freedom, consistent alike with the prerogatives of the monarch, the stability of the throne, and the happiness of the people. The old Bourbon dynasty, however, kept quiet possession of the throne for fifteen years after the second restoration, when Charles the Tenth, under the advice of a profligate ministry, violated the charter he had given to France, by the unlawful edicts of July, 1830. In an instant the people flew to arms, and, to the everlasting honor of their name, proved that they were worthy to enjoy the rights they were resolved to maintain. In three days they conquered the guards of the King, dethroned and expelled a monarch—yet preserved the monarchy, restored the charter, and thus reinstated the nation in its immunities and rights ; while the tri-colored flag, that national emblem of the Revolution, was again unfurled to live in the affections of the people. France thus derived the full benefit of our early example, and of her former struggles and sacrifices ; and her national character now stands redeemed and regenerated before the world.

The laws and institutions of a country have also a direct influence on the individual character of a people, in their social relations. Russia is ruled by a despotic emperor.

The improvements of the age, however, are duly appreciated and readily adopted by a wise administration, under the advice of enlightened councillors; and her government is, no doubt, well administered. But the people are cerfs, without education or character, famed neither for private virtues nor personal spirit: for they submit to personal chastisement because their condition gives them neither the privilege nor the right to resist. If Sweden, on the contrary, the peasantry are proverbially honest, they constitute an order of the State, and are represented in the Diet. The Swede resists an attack on his personal rights, and he is protected, in so doing, by the laws of the land. The people of Prussia, whose heroic efforts and sacrifices contributed so eminently to the downfall of Napoleon, were promised a charter by their king. It has been withheld, or rather delayed, until they shall be prepared, by education, for its enjoyment. The necessity, as well as the right of popular education, are thus admitted, and its practical benefits are becoming generally dispensed; and thus the people of Prussia and of a part of Germany are beginning to feel and enjoy the blessings of that civil liberty which their own exertions prepared and secured when they broke the fetters of Napoleon; while the formation of the Germanic league furnishes the best evidence of the amelioration of the social condition of a people arising from the progressive improvement in their political institutions. The English people have long been famed for independence of character, pride of country, and a disposition to resist oppression of every description; because England is a country of men, and laws, and liberty: of men who know their rights, and, knowing, dare maintain,—of laws that have endured for ages, and which form their so-called constitution, for England has no other constitution—of liberty, consequent upon the pure administration of just

laws, in which all ranks feel an interest,—that liberty of the subject which allows no man, however high in rank or power, except the king, to be above the laws established for the security of the meanest subject ; and although, as has been said, the winds of heaven may enter unbidden the humble dwelling of the poor man, yet there, even the king himself dare not enter.

Climate materially and directly regulates and modifies the habits and pursuits of man, and thus qualifies and influences his character. The temperate zone is most favorable for the full development and perfection of all his qualities and faculties. The inhabitants of the frozen regions are compelled to a long season of inactivity, during which they must intermit their exertions, and their energies are bound by the icy fetters of their climate ; and Nature, thus restricted, is bountiful in her favors neither to vegetable nor animal life.

In the torrid zone, man languishes under the rays of a vertical sun, and he is incapable of long-continued mental or bodily exertion. The stimulus to enterprize is withdrawn, the energy necessary to accomplish important undertakings is wanting, and man contents himself with enjoying the bounties of Nature, so profusely lavished, with as little cost or effort to himself as may be consistent with the security of his subsistence. In those regions, removed from the two extremes, where Nature is neither too niggardly with her favors nor too profuse of her bounties, where the necessity for exertion and the hope of reward are combined, and where, by the application of industry, energy, and skill, man is sure to reap the fruit of his exertions, and to enjoy, in security, the reward of his toils,—there have our race ever been most celebrated for their success in everything that can elevate character, adorn life, and add value to existence.

There are other causes, also, operating on the mind of man, tending to excite the imagination, and which, by soothing the feelings and leading to serious contemplation, are not without their effect in improving his character.

The inhabitants of rude and mountainous regions are proverbially famed for attachment to their homes and to their country. Nature, in all her works, is ever attractive, but when she appears on her grandest scale, in her wilder forms and more romantic scenery, she fixes the attention, enchains the affection, elevates the feelings, and inspires her votaries with the noblest emotions. The natives of Switzerland, which is so justly celebrated for its sublime and magnificent scenery, are well known to be devoutly attached to their native valleys and their romantic wilds. Here, as in a brilliant panorama, are presented at one view the snow-clad mountain with the verdant lawn and fertile plain. The snow-drift and the icicle, side by side with the fruitful valley and the vine-clad hill; the lofty cataract and the foaming torrent, with the flowing rivulet and placid lake—all mingled and blended in harmony and beauty. There too is seen the fathomless glacier, that hath for ages formed the icy barrier between those vast chains of mountains, with summer, teeming in luxuriance, at their base, and everlasting winter reigning on their lofty summits. There, too, is heard that mighty sound, which once heard can never be forgotten, the echo of the falling avalanche; resembling the thunder of the spheres, and seeming to rock the mountains on their deep foundations. The rising and setting sun, the advance of day, and the approach of night, have their peculiar and appropriate beauties. As the peasant of the mountain rises, after a night of storm, to greet the return of day, he stands in silent and solemn contemplation of the approaching glories of the dawn. The first glimmerings of day, lifting the veil of

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mist and night, gradually unfold the drapery of the picture which Nature here presents in unrivalled magnificence. Each surrounding object, dimly seen at first, rising in its shadowy form, now starts upon the view, then seems to recede from the approaching light, as the orb of day gives token of his coming in pride, and pomp, and majesty. Here his first rays reflect the broad shadows of the mountain on the calm surface of the lake below ; there, glancing through the valleys, they gild the spires of the village just emerging from the wave ; then new beauties in the landscape, rising with his advancing beams, display their varying form and hue, distinct and bright ; now, far and wide, he fires the hill-tops as his light ascends, then bursting forth, he shines in gorgeous splendor on the snow-capped summit of the Alps that bound the distant view.

With feelings thus chastened and solemnized, man goes forth to his daily toil ; and when calm and sunshine cheer the scene, he awaits, in joyful expectation, the milder beauties of the closing day. The setting sun already marks the lengthened shadows of the mountains, which stretch their huge limbs like spectres chiding his departure ; while his retiring beams, lingering in the vale and reflected from the mountain sides, shine on the verdant lawns, and fertile plains, and glassy lakes below, as on a sea of burnished gold ; until the varying tints and ever-changing hues, that seem to brighten ere they are lost to sight, gradually disappear as twilight covers the face of Nature with its deepening shade. The peasants fold their arms, while silence reigns unbroken, save by the distant tinklings that steal upon the ear, or the wild, yet cheering, spirit-stirring notes of the goatherd's song, as they swell on the breeze, and echo through the mountain, and fall gently on the vale. Good night,—good night,—is heard from all around, as the curtain of departing day falls on the en-

chanted scene. No matter where in after-life their lot is cast, no matter in what distant clime it shall be their fate to wander, far from those endearing associations, these impressions endure with their existence—these scenes are never effaced from their memory—that song still vibrates on their ears—whenever, in fancy or in a dream, they revisit, in fond recollection, their own, their native wilds.

It has been remarked, by no inexperienced observer of human nature, that if he were allowed to write the *songs* of a nation, he cared not who framed its *laws*. This assertion is, of course, too broad to be taken in its literal sense, yet the effect of national songs in enlisting the feelings and sympathies, and arousing an honorable emulation in pursuit of national fame and glory, is too well known not to be universally acknowledged. The celebrated Marseillois Hymn of revolutionary France operated as a powerful stimulant, as well as a noble incentive, not only to the military enthusiasm, but to the patriotism and devotion of that excitable and chivalrous nation. It addressed itself, with effect, to the pride and feelings and sympathies of a people, who, as they supposed, for having broken the fetters of tyranny at home, were menaced with invasion and a foreign yoke; and this energetic and well-timed appeal aroused them to a quick sense of their own wrongs, and of the insults and injuries and oppression that might await them from the combined attack, within and without, of the foes of freedom and of France. This national anthem was chanted in their cities; it rung through the villages and resounded throughout the realm; and wherever its sounds were heard, or its words were felt, it proved a trump omnipotent to charm. The cry "To arms!" "To arms!" was echoed through the land, and France became a nation of soldiers. The defenders of their

soil, as they flocked to the standard of their country, repeated its animating and spirit-stirring strains; and as their advancing columns, marshalled in defence of their liberties and rights, pressed onward to meet their invaders, the melody of song mingled with the war-notes of the trumpet and the drum; and while national enthusiasm and military ardor spread and communicated from rank to rank, the sounds of vocal music that rose on the air, as the legions of France joined in conflict with their foes, were heard amid the din of battle and the clash of arms.

What did not the songs of Dibdin accomplish for the British navy? Displaying a thorough knowledge of naval tactics, and a minute acquaintance with all the details of the naval profession, they depicted in glowing but natural colors the trials and struggles, the cares and dangers, the excitements and enjoyments, the triumphs and glories, attending the progress of a seaman's life, and the achievement of naval victories. There were indeed circumstances, peculiar to the situation of Great Britain, required, perhaps, to give existence to the spirit that pervaded these songs, that favored their effect, and gave increased value to the moral influences they imparted. Surrounded by the ocean, the habits and pursuits of her people must necessarily partake of the character of a seaman's life. Without the benefit of rivers, international intercourse was carried on principally by sea, and no inconsiderable portion of her population, residing on her coasts, derived their maintenance from the sea, and lived a sailor's life. Whole villages, nay towns, were sometimes composed entirely of fishermen, adventuring daily on the ocean for their daily bread. All therefore had an interest in their success, and all felt a sympathy in their hazardous employment; and accordingly, when the approach of night,

or of impending storm, created fears for their safety, one and all—friends and relatives, mothers, wives and children, would crowd the shore ; and as their fragile barks, now lost to sight, now borne upon the billow's crest, were dimly seen careering o'er the wave, would stand with straining eyes and outstretched arms to await and welcome their return. There was thus created an identity of interest, of feeling, and of sympathy, allied to a pride of calling, when attended with difficulty and danger, which, when duly encouraged, and properly availed of, are attended with enduring national benefits. Great Britain was probably indebted solely to her insular position for her safety during that eventful period when nearly the whole continent of Europe was under the dominion of her mightiest and greatest foe, who was intent only on her conquest : and she then discovered that her sole protection was in her wooden walls ; and not only the maintenance of her Empire of the seas, but her very existence as a powerful nation, required that she should gain the victories of the Nile and of Trafalgar.

The songs of Dibdin lent her no inefficient aid in laying a foundation for those victories, and for the maintenance of her naval supremacy. Whatever could excite the ardor and animate the patriotism of her people, was embodied in these truly popular and national songs, so well calculated to inspire a zeal for naval service and a thirst for naval glory. They appealed to the pride of country and to the better feelings of our nature. The delights of home, the bonds of friendship and fellowship, the blandishments and endearments of love, the hope of conquest and the reward of victory, were all portrayed in their graphic descriptions, and the spirit they inspired pervaded the realm ; all classes chaunted their numbers, all ranks joined in the chorus.

There were none so high but admitted the sympathy they awakened, none so low as not to be aroused by their heartfelt appeals. In every ale-house and cottage, in every hamlet and hovel, might be seen, sketched in rude characters along the walls, their ship, their flag, the battle and the chace, the proud array of their victorious fleet and the wrecked squadron of a prostrate foe: and as the gathering throngs would meet to listen to the tales of Ocean, and hear the music of these songs,—as the night-winds howled around the casements, and the raging of the tempest brought to mind the perils of the deep, all who had served their country and faced her foes, by turns recounted their adventures, and painted, in glowing colors, the deeds of daring and the feats of arms of their companions in danger and glory. On such a night as this we weathered the dangers of that rocky coast;—in such a storm we cleared for action and unfurled our flag, and dared—but dared in vain—the foe-man to the fight;—in that hard conflict we bore our part;—in that proud victory we gained our laurels;—in honor of our country's banner, and in defence of our country's rights, together we have met, and shared, and stood, and braved, the breeze and gale, the battle and the storm. While thus the story and the song went round, even the mother with her infant in her arms, as she caught the enthusiasm of the hour, would clasp her boy, and fondly look and think when *he* should follow in the footsteps of his sire,—should learn to brave these dangers of the seas, and mingle in the strife of arms.

This was the charm that taught Old England's meteor flag—so called—to brave the battle and the breeze, and made her seamen feel “at home” upon the deep. But her descendants in the West, who shared her national spirit, had now grown up to manhood. We too had sought the ocean as our

home, for our commerce whitened every sea, and our banner waved in every clime : and notwithstanding the broad expanse of Ocean's vast domain, we met and jostled in the pathways of the deep. She claimed dominion where we claimed an equal and a common right ; wrongful encroachments made us foes, and then, in evil hour for her and prouder day for us, on that element which we may hereafter call our own, we met in conflict ; and then, in equal fight, there stood confessed the drooping pennant and the broken charm.

The love of country, identified with national character, is strongly implanted in every honest and manly heart. It is confined to no rank or condition of life. It is sometimes strongly felt by those in the highest sphere, even when deprived of their rank and titles, earned in their country's service. And a purer devotion to her cause is often shown by those in humbler walks and subordinate stations, who fall fighting the battles of their country, knowing that their names will never outlive their deeds. What was the fate and what the conduct of Ney, the gallant but misguided Ney, chief among the marshals of France, and bravest of the brave ! He had passed through a brilliant military career with distinguished and unblemished reputation. Sent by the king to oppose Napoleon, he found his troops disaffected to the royal cause and in favor of their former emperor ; when, unwilling to attempt useless resistance, whereby to hazard a civil war, he remained with Napoleon, instead of returning to the king, and thereby committed an error of judgment. But the treaty of Paris provided for his case : in the opinion of one of the signers of that treaty, it was intended to protect, and should have saved him. The peers of the realm, however, representing the country in whose service he had combatted in many a hard-fought field, and bravely won the laurels that graced his brow, pronounced his doom. Yet

for that country his last prayer was uttered: "My rank, my honors, my titles, and my fame, what, and where are they now? I am still Michael Ney, a soldier of France, whose first duty is to obey. Lead me to my fate." He found a remnant of those veterans, whom he had often led to victory, drawn up to execute his sentence. When refusing the proffered bandage for eyes too long accustomed to meet death in the field of battle to fear it then, and placing his hand on his heart, his last command was, "Comrades, fire there;" and as the winged messengers of death followed his direction, his last and dying shout was, "France for ever!" During our last war with Great Britain, in the action between the *Hornet* and *Penguin*, in the southern seas, a marine on board the *Hornet*, badly wounded, was about being carried below: he begged for permission to remain on deck until the battle was over. Having, as he said, the use of his arms, he still could load and fire his musket: and if seated with his back against the mast for a support, he yet could do his duty. His request was complied with. When in this state of suffering from his wounds, with rude bandages hastily applied to his shattered limbs, with the tide of life fast ebbing to its close, he shared to the last the toils, the glories of the fight: and when he saw the foeman strike his flag, while his own banner proudly waved aloft, 'twas all he asked—for, with the first shout of victory, his gallant spirit sought its last repose. In the action between the frigate *Essex* and her two antagonists, the *Phœbe* and the *Cherub*, in the Pacific, the *Essex*, becoming crippled in her spars on leaving port, and thus rendered unable either to gain an offing, or regain the harbor, was compelled to anchor, where she lay a target for her foes, who chose their distance and position. The *Essex*, thus placed at their mercy, was compelled to sustain the unequal conflict without a possible chance of victory, until, as was eloquently said, "Humanity tore down

the colors which valor had nailed to the mast." Fighting thus, without a hope of success, as her men, fast falling at her guns, were carried wounded below, their last entreaty, their earnest supplication, was : " Oh, let that banner wave while my life lasts—strike not our colors till I am gone—let me not survive the triumph of the foe"—thus exhibiting, in bright relief, the ruling passion strong in death. They knew full well *their* names would be inscribed on no scroll to live hereafter in story or in song ; they would have no niche in temple or in hall—no tablet to record their services—no monument to prove a country's gratitude, or a people's thanks, where, as the future sailor-boy should thither roam, his delighted eye might rest, perhaps, on the proud memorial of his father's fame. They fell far from country, kindred, and home, yet their last thought was of the ship they had so nobly defended, their last gaze was on the flag of their country, in whose service they died. They had no requiem but the winds of heaven ; their only monument was Ocean's wave.

On what foundation do we now rest our hopes, and on what basis do we securely repose for the preservation and improvement of our own national character ? We owe much to our advantages of primeval origin, but we owe still more to the wisdom and firmness, and forecast, of our Revolutionary fathers. As a people, we are better educated than any other nation, and as a whole, we are more enterprising and energetic : we are proud of our country, attached to her institutions, observant of her laws, and jealous of our rights ; and although religion is not incorporated, in any way, with our form of government, being wisely exempted from civil jurisdiction, yet no people are more attached to its worship and ordinances ; and with entire toleration of all sects and persuasions, the Bible and its doctrines are universally circulated and received as the foundation of religious faith, the

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source of present comfort, the shield of moral virtue, and the anchor of future hope.

A perfect equality in political rights, and in all the privileges and immunities that belong to man in the enjoyment of rational freedom, is one of the distinguishing characteristics of our republican form of government, but a perfect equality of social condition or of mental capacity is what Nature never designed nor accomplished. In monarchies, there is always a class forming an aristocracy of wealth and title, and in some countries, as a necessary consequence, of talents also. Titles are granted by the crown either as a boon or as a reward of merit, and the wealth connected with title is usually the accumulation of ages, perpetuated in a few families and names; and thus birth, titles and wealth descend to remote posterity, and unless there is some approach to constitutional or representative government, as in England, and of late in France, talent of the higher order will necessarily be confined to the higher classes, and thus the empire of mind is added to the power of the sceptre. With us these distinctions are unknown; talent, including acquirement of all descriptions, is confined to no rank, or class, or profession,—it belongs to the republic. Wealth is divided among all, not hoarded for the benefit of a few; for the accumulation of to-day is scattered by the divisions of the morrow. With us, wealth, of itself, confers no distinction: when associated with worth and talent it may dispense its benefits and prove a blessing, but wealth enjoys no peculiar privilege, nor is it a passport to public favor; and it may be said, to the credit of our political leaders, that since the formation of our government, they have neither sought nor possessed riches, nor has money ever been used or abused to secure popular favor.

With us the end and object of the great mass is to obtain a competence, and to improve their condition. This pursuit is more universal than in any other country, and for an obvious reason: the road is open to all, and all are invited to pursue a course where success is likely to attend every well-intentioned and well-directed endeavor. New villages, towns and cities are continually being founded, and improved; new territories are settling, new channels of international communication are constantly opening, and new prospects brightening on the hopes of the industrious and energetic; and if individual enterprise is not always successful, national benefit is usually attained by its exertions. With an extended sea-coast, lined with capacious harbors, bays and inlets; with immense inland seas and mighty rivers, we are provided with vast means of international intercourse. But we have improved these natural advantages by a more extensive system of internal improvements than any European nation has yet projected or executed. The Erie Canal and Croton Aqueduct, of our own State, may not only compare with any work of the kind in Europe, but we may challenge her to point out *any* work of hers that can form any comparison at all with ours. Contiguous lines of railroads, with myriads of steamers crowding our rivers, lakes and bays, connect the most distant parts of the Union. The respective States of the confederacy share more or less extensively, according to their peculiar advantages of position or population, in the three great sources of national wealth, Agriculture, Manufactures, and Commerce: while the diversity of pursuits gives rise to no permanently conflicting interests. The different sections of our extended empire, thus dependent upon and identified with each other, and thus brought in contact by means of the facilities afforded by these internal communications, become bound together by the adamant chains of mutual and common interest.

We have a form of government so free, that the people, who possess the sovereign power, not only choose those who are invested with brief authority, to frame the laws, but elect also, and at short intervals, the Chief Magistrate who is to execute them. And our ancestors gave us a Constitution, where the principles of civil liberty and popular rights are well defined and carefully secured ; but above all, with a wise and extended forecast, they so guarded its provisions, with respect to amendments, that it cannot possibly be changed for light causes, and indeed any changes whatever become less likely to be introduced in proportion as we increase our population and add to the number of the States composing the Union. On this basis rest our hopes for perpetuity of the blessings we enjoy. I cannot therefore refrain from expressing an opinion, that it manifests neither the sagacity of the statesman nor the prophetic vision of the patriot—for occasional error in the exercise, or even for an actual abuse of a power, conferred by the Constitution—to desire to abridge that power by altering that sacred instrument, which will hereafter owe its enduring value to the veneration in which it is held, in consequence of the permanency of its character ; and which, if we are prevented from changing, Time may improve, but which Time itself may not destroy.

If such are our present privileges and future prospects, let us not be unmindful of our responsibilities. If, with such superior advantages, we have the means of forming a national character such as no other nation possesses, are we not bound to set an example to the world ? How have the interests and rights, the intelligence and character, of this people, been represented of late in our State and National Legislatures ? Have these bodies reflected the lights and information, or justified the hopes and expectations, of an enlightened age ? Or do we not require a patriotism and a

public virtue of a higher order than of late exercised in these departments, to guide us through the difficulties that surround, and the dangers that beset us?—not dangers to the stability of our Union, for that even the many-headed monster of Abolition itself cannot shake, deep-rooted as it is in the affections of the people ; but dangers that threaten the permanent welfare as well as the fair fame and character of the Republic. With all our boasted independence, we tolerate, in some respects, a slavish dependence of mind. We allow ourselves to be dependent upon the opinions of Europe. If foreigners of rank or consequence visit our country, we await in breathless suspense to hear what they will say of us : making their opinions, which they rarely acquire an opportunity of forming correctly, the arbiters of our fate. If, with a manly independence, we looked for the opinions of intelligent and enlightened men with a view to correct our defects, we should perform an obvious yet a difficult duty, that of searching for truth for its own sake and for our own good ; but we are too prone to surrender our better judgment in deference to that of the older world. We are unfortunately too apt to imitate their manners and customs because they differ from ours, and to adopt their tastes because they are dissimilar : in a word, to sacrifice, without reflection or discrimination, our own distinctive character. The prominent public men of our country, who, from their situation, must necessarily, to some extent, lead or mislead public opinion, are also lamentably deficient in independence of character. They are fearful of expressing opinions in regard to measures of vital importance to the country, lest they should render themselves temporarily unpopular, and they thus refuse to give a healthy tone to public sentiment and a proper direction to public opinion, for there is hardly a leading public man in the Union who has not been found on both sides and on all sides of every great leading national measure

affecting directly the interests and prosperity of the country. It need not of course be expected that the evil propensities, the warring passions, the deep-seated prejudices, the sectional jealousies and the vindictive feelings of our nature, or the promptings of unchastened ambition, are to be changed in character with our form of government ; although the tendency of our institutions, by diminishing the opportunities for their gratification, may, by thus imposing restraints, give them a better direction, and thereby weaken their influence. Poor human nature, however, in possession of power, is not only prone, but sure to abuse it. An occasional majority may and will rule with despotic sway. Possessing, for a time, the legion of numbers, directed by a common impulse, and obedient to the nod of favorite leaders, wrong will be committed, and evil consequences ensue. But this cannot be called public opinion, on which we must rely to correct such evils. Public opinion with us is conservative in its character ; it is the calm reflection of intelligent masses qualified to judge, and who, having their own rights and interests at stake, are likely in most cases, in the end, to judge correctly. But the leaders of the political parties of our day are strikingly deficient in those essential qualifications which so eminently distinguished our Revolutionary ancestors : in that patriotism which looked only to country, regardless of self—in that consistency of opinion, which, founded upon conviction, was uninfluenced by the dictates of expediency—in that high-minded and far-seeing statesmanship, which looked forward to stable measures of national policy—scorning that spirit of subserviency which would have disqualified them, in their own estimation, for claiming the suffrages or deserving the approbation of an intelligent people.

We cannot, therefore, too often refer the political leaders of our day to a contemplation of the character and example

of our Revolutionary fathers, who have left us the sacred legacy of their fame. Contending for principle, they boldly defied the power of the mother country, of whom it was eloquently said, "that she had dotted over the map of the earth with her possessions, whose morning drum-beat, following the sun, and keeping company with the hours, circled the earth in one continuous and consecutive strain of the martial airs of England." They foresaw the dangers and the consequences, yet hesitated not to hazard the issue of the contest for the hope of their reward. They jeopardized or sacrificed all that they possessed for their country, and they triumphed in that country's cause: and when the liberties they had achieved were to be secured and perpetuated by that palladium of our rights, a written Constitution, their unceasing labors accomplished that glorious work; and when the government it founded was to be administered, and its practical advantages illustrated, free from selfish aims, or misguided ambition, they applied themselves with renewed effort to establish its character and its credit. They thus laid the sure foundation for individual and national prosperity; and they saw this Republic take its stand among the nations of the earth, prosperous at home and respected abroad. The morning of a life thus devoted to the service of their country, led to a meridian beaming on the accomplishment of their proudest hopes; and they reaped the only reward which their disinterested patriotism asked for, or expected, the assurance of their country's happiness, and a well-founded reliance on the duration of its liberties.

A life thus spent might well look forward to a calm repose. Their work was done, and, as their advancing days gave notice of their approaching hour, there was vouchsafed to them that unclouded sunset, which, lingering in the distant horizon of their hopes, and beaming, with tranquillizing lustre,

on the verge of sight, as if to indicate another and a brighter dawn, sheds its mild influence on the waning hours of life, and gilds, with calm serenity, the evening of its days.

Their race is run, and their descendants enjoy the fruit of their labors and sacrifices, their talents and their fame. Our task is comparatively easy. It was theirs to build up and establish what we have only to maintain and secure.

Let us then preserve our Constitution, in all its integrity, as the ark of our political safety. Let us guard our fair fame and our national character as our most sacred inheritance; and we may then leave, with confidence, in the hands of an over-ruling Providence, the future destinies of our **NATIVE LAND.**

Jamaica Lyceum,
25th April, 1843.



